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Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Social protection and human rights issues have enjoyed a powerful, sustainable and collaborative relationship and been regarded as priorities since 1948, when the right to social security was included in Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At that time, it was acknowledged that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being, including human rights such as food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. In addition, under social protection programs, women are the beneficiaries of social security including social insurance and public and private pension schemes.

Despite significant progress in the extension of social protection in many parts of the world, the right to social security is not yet a reality for a majority of the world's population. Only 45 per cent of the global population are effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit, while the remaining 55 per cent — as many as 4 billion people — are left unprotected. ILO estimates also show that only 29 per cent of the global population are covered by comprehensive social security systems that include the full range of benefits, from child and family benefits to old-age pensions. Yet the large majority — 71 per cent, or 5.2 billion people — are not, or are only partially, protected.

Soroptimist International sees social protection as a key strategy for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all. Nationally appropriate Social Protection policies and programs including social protection floors have been recognized as playing an important part in addressing the poverty and vulnerability of women, children, older persons, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. Social protection policies have great potential in facilitating the rights to education, social security, health, food, shelter, and water, in accordance with the obligations of States under international human rights law. When used as a floor and not a ceiling, social protection floors can contribute significantly to gender equality and the realization of minimum essential levels of those rights especially for marginalized groups.

We believe that quality education accessible beyond primary stages, can be regarded as one of the major pillars of social protection, offering women and girls the opportunity to fulfil their potential, engage in social entrepreneurship or find meaningful employment. Along with the provision of supportive health systems, adequate housing to meet family needs and the safety net of social security financial provisions across the life span, mean that women and girls especially, can be lifted above the poverty level and provided with a self-sustaining future.

Soroptimist International advocates the following to lift women and girls from poverty:

- accessible free quality education at all levels for all women and girls as a platform of support to enable them to move out of poverty whilst contributing to economic development locally and nationally;
- the empowerment of women and girls through recognized employment that provides a minimum living wage with the provision of accessible financial support and training enabling those who wish to develop skills of entrepreneurship;
- provision of full, quality health care, especially maternal health and child care, supported by appropriate education and information on sexual and reproductive health rights;

- provision of social protection systems and floors for the most vulnerable, especially those with disabilities and long-term illnesses and older persons;
- ensure through social protection policies safe shelter and food security for women and girls in vulnerable situations;
- Safe access to water and sanitation for homes, schools and workplaces with the involvement of women in community management of these facilities, ensuring that the time resource recovered for women and girls is available for positive action enabling development;
- Improved levels of disaggregated data collection which provide information that enables positive measures to be targeted for those most in need.

We Urge:

Governments to create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional, and international levels to provide universal, human rights based social protection for all. Goal 1 of the 2030 Agenda for Social Development to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, calls for the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, as well as the achievement of substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable by 2030.

Governments to recognize and implement existing agreements. To be protected is not a privilege, but a right as stated in Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This right was reaffirmed by the Social Protection Floors Recommendation unanimously adopted by 184 members of the International Labour Conference in 2012.

Social protection is an investment in people and thus in long-term social and economic development. Nationally appropriate social protection systems and floors make a critical contribution to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals aimed at poverty eradication and exerting a positive impact on economic growth, social cohesion and social development.

Member States for decades have been entering into agreements and adopting resolutions which provide for many forms of social protection for women and girls. However, for many women and girls personal and family safety, access to education, economic security, food security, safe shelter and a healthy life are a long way from being achieved. It is no longer acceptable that action has not been taken or is implemented slowly. In order to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda, Governments must immediately act on the promises given so that no one is left behind.